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THE GROWTH OF THE MISSIONARY IDEA IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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II. THE POST-EXILIC MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

The exile in Babylon is an event of immense significance for the history of Israel's religion and no doubt casts its shadow over a great part of this ancient literature. But even so we must not look upon it as a new beginning or as a complete severance from the past. The religious life and thought of the people preserved a certain continuity in spite of the violence of the catastrophe, and the fact that its scattered elements were driven in such widely different directions. Soon the Jewish people will have three or more centers instead of one, and that fact whatever influence it may have upon theory will play its part as a preparation for a more universal faith. Now it may be worth while to repeat the statement that the glory of "the progressive revelation" that we possess in the Old Testament is the fact that it grows to ever larger and clearer forms through the living experience of the individual and the nation. It is some centuries later before the book is finally closed, completely set apart and deified as if it had never had anything to do with human life. At the period we are now concerned with, the life was still fresh, pulsating with all the most passionate emotions that man is capable of feeling. The question "How can we sing Jehovah's song in a foreign land?" is not a theoretical one; it came from the hearts of men who felt that their piety and patriotism were one, that their religious worship and modes of thought were rooted in a particular soil and that the crisis through which they were passing must either destroy or enlarge their faith. In individual cases, no doubt, the faith was lost, but through the stress and strain of the conflict the type was ennobled. As a matter of fact the particularistic and the universalistic stream are both sharpened and emphasized in the Jew and in his sacred literature. From this post-exilic literature one can easily prove either of two opposite views by

taking a special class of texts that stand side by side and neglecting the other. Or even without adopting such a crude procedure we may find the opposing tendencies in the same text, and we have to confess that it is difficult to find the highest view quite clear from all limitations. While then the bitter experiences of the Exiles tended to separate the faithful ones from "the world" and helped to define for them more clearly the idea of the kingdom of God, it also quickened thoughts concerning the separateness and sacredness of the individual life and the spirituality of sacrifice which have a distinctly universal or missionary tendency. It is of the very heart of the missionary faith that the true gospel can be translated into all tongues and the real sacrifice offered in any place. This the Jew began to learn, after the Exile, not from any theoretical course of instruction but from the deepest needs of his own life. He was thrown out into the world and carried his religion and literature with him. The idea of the salvation of the individual from hell, a motive till quite recently made prominent in missionary appeals, did not play any part in pre-Christian times.

This missionary movement consisted in the scattering of a people and the preservation of a literature. The very fact that the Jew in exile, cut off from temple and altar, was thrown back upon such literature as he possessed was itself distinctly favorable to missionary work. The character of the literature stood the test; it was sustenance and inspiration in the dark hour. Proving its power for these men it showed its power for more general human service. Had the Jew remained in Palestine, possessing any considerable extent of territory, and accepted the Deuteronomic doctrine of one temple and altar, the Book and the school would gradually have acquired a larger power and played a larger part. But the Exile hastened this process, and these things which would have been in the homeland real helps in the sphere of religion became for Jews in Babylon and Egypt an absolute necessity. The two great missionary religions, Mohammedanism and Christianity, are religions of the Book, and each in their own way claim connection with and use the Old Testament Scriptures. We cannot then speak of these Jews as a mere sect; in their selection of literature for survival they showed a catholic temper and have given us a book that is, though small in quantity, comprehensive in its scope and human in its spirit, embodying the

fear and skepticism as well as the faith and hope of struggling men. This much, at any rate, is certain that from the Exile onward the Jew became more distinctly a man of the great world in commerce, in literature, and to some degree in missionary work. He was to a large extent cut off from the soil and his attentions turned more fully to trade and literature. The trader renders service in bringing nations into closer relationship with each other; freer trade may mean kindlier feelings and a more easy interchange of ideas. The Jew driven into the region of trade has often been despised as a selfish schemer, but even there he rendered service to humanity as well as gained his own living. Today one of the greatest missionary movements would be to bring more of the spirit of Jesus Christ into the commercial relations of classes and nations. The Christian missionaries will have a better time when there is not such a deep division between sacred preaching and "secular" practice.

The further advance in literature took a more universal tone, the so-called "Wisdom Literature," the literature of reflection, is less national and more human in its spirit. The Proverbs, many of the Psalms, Job, and Ecclesiastes deal with subjects of large universal interest; they appeal to humanity and not merely to the Jew. The forms in which these subjects are presented still have a Jewish twist and in most cases it is a twist that the Jews possess in common with mankind. On the selfish side, the desire for ease, the demand for "profit," the Jew has much in common with other men and he finds that on the nobler side—the desire for light, the hunger for love, the hope of immortality—he is in sympathy with the great souls of other nations. So, on the whole, while the Jewish church is forced in this later period to shelter itself behind a hard shell of its exclusiveness and to fight a fierce battle for its own existence and the preservation of its sacred literature, the growth of literature and the school tends to keep alive the spirit which is ready for the dissemination of truth and the reception of ideas. As to the individual Jew he thus became a missionary in spite of himself. The translation of his Bible into Greek, beginning more than two centuries before the Christian era, was meant in the first place simply to satisfy the religious needs of the Greek-speaking Jews, but it was an event of more than local significance. It brought that fruitful literature into the great current

of the world's life and prepared for the admission into Judaism of large transforming thoughts of God and the world, so that when the great struggle came which set the Christian gospel free from local Judaism and for the world-wide mission, that great service was rendered by men who had read the message of Hebrew prophets and poets in their Greek form. The Jewish synagogue or chapel in the varied centers of Greek and Roman life was a missionary center, even if not aggressively evangelistic in tone. If the teacher did not go to outsiders in pleading, persuasive tones, telling of Jehovah's righteousness and love, those who were curious or eager could "come and see," and we have it on good authority that these, as a rule, belonged to the class of noble truth-seeking souls. These synagogues were evidently, though in a small measure, that which the church ought to be in all ages, centers of spiritual attraction, lights shining in the dark places.

This brief statement of the facts shows that after the Exile the Hebrew nation lost its political independence and importance, only to be regained for one brief brilliant period, but at the same time its scattered members and the influence of its sacred literature began to exert a more powerful effect in those centers of intellectual and religious thought which were destined to rule the future centuries; and further that this influence while distinctly Jewish contained elements which may fairly be classed as missionary in their character. We must now turn back and close the subject by noting the complex character of this literature.

If by a missionary standpoint we mean an absolute spiritual monotheism free from all national and ecclesiastical limitation, with clear comprehension and acceptance of the divine command, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations," then we have to confess that this was never reached in the Old Testament; but in all fairness we must add that it has been very difficult for the Christian church to reach it. Much of the old tribalism has been carried over into varied forms of ecclesiastical Christianity, and with other Jewish and pagan survivals has shown a remarkable tenacity.

Still the Old Testament, at its nobler heights, shows us a spirit struggling with these limitations and stretches forth outspread hands and a longing gaze to a richer future. In passages of the type of Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4 we have a missionary idea. The mountain

of Jehovah's house is to be established in the top of the mountains—and *all nations* shall flow unto it. Many peoples are heard saying:

Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
And he will teach us of his ways,
And we will walk in his paths;
For out of Zion shall go forth the law
And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.

We are not now concerned with the promise of universal peace which here as elsewhere is an important feature in the picture of the final days of blessing. What we have to emphasize is the fact that here the nations, all of them, come of their own accord to Jerusalem because it is the seat of a pure worship and the source of a righteous law. Further, this law or teaching, though we are not told by what means, shall go forth from Jerusalem. This implies a consciousness of possessing a higher truth and nobler religion than was elsewhere available, and if we take the Hebrew religion at its highest, as we ought in all fairness to do, we may confidently say that history has amply vindicated this claim, while reproving in the name of the Christ the temper in which it is sometimes made. The thought of the inherent attractiveness of a great religion is surely an aspect of the missionary idea which is of permanent value. No amount of elaborate organization or noisy aggressiveness will compensate for the lack of this. True, there is a higher stage when men are prompted to go out into the dark places and carry the light of life with them; but when men had not yet reached the thought that the highest revelation can be separated from the earthly Jerusalem it was a noble vision to think of the God-given truth as by its very splendor passing beyond the city walls and even the national boundaries, dazzling the eyes of needy strangers, and drawing their wistful gaze toward that mountain, the city of the great King. Let us hold fast then to this great truth, that the highest religion in its very nature is a winsome, attractive force. The righteousness of Jehovah manifesting itself among his people and spreading peace in the world: this is surely a permanent element in the missionary idea. It gives the heathen whom we seek to evangelize a right to ask whether the glorious gospel which we proclaim in such tones is a working force in our national life and personal experience.

Another striking and typical passage is found in that late section of Isa., chaps. 24-27:

And Jehovah of hosts will prepare for all peoples on this mountain a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy the face of the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. And the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth. For Jehovah hath spoken it.

We have omitted the line that promises the swallowing up of death for ever, as it is probably not an original element of this beautiful little song. The special feature of Jehovah's future manifestation here dwelt upon is the conquest of sorrow in which *all peoples* are to share but which is to take place in this mountain, i. e., Jerusalem. It is likely the veil is not the covering of prejudice which hinders men from seeing the beauties of the Law, but rather the veil which hides the face of the figure which represents the nations. Jehovah lifts the veil and lo, there are tears which must be wiped away before the invited guest can come to the banquet table. Here we have a mighty faith that the God of Israel has rich revelations still in store, that he will prepare a noble banquet for the hungry and sorrowful peoples. But the banquet must be spread on "*this mountain*," Jehovah's chosen sanctuary. This great hope here expressed in what was for those days a broad catholic spirit has still its local limitation. But when we look at such passages sympathetically we have no difficulty in declaring that this noble inconsistency was unavoidable and that only those who are quite destitute of the historical sense can fail to realize that here we have a widening outlook due to a conviction that the greatest things cannot be the monopoly of a sect.

When we turn to Zechariah's wonderful vision of "the city without a wall" (2:1-5) and read it in the light of the later history, as briefly sketched at the beginning of this article, though we know that the prophet could not see that history in detail, yet we cannot help marveling that the form in which he expresses his message can so easily be used to express the actual development. His idea of a city without a wall is a bold one and must have seemed daring if not absurd to his contemporaries, for in those days the wall was an essential feature of a city, and the lives of men were encompassed by separating walls

of many kinds. In a different and wider sense than the prophet dreamed of, Jerusalem was in later days spread out like open villages throughout the world of that day. The real Jerusalem, the faith, the teaching for which that name rightly stands, was scattered by the synagogues and then after many struggles sent freely out into the great current of the world's life. But the suggestion that the real boundary of God's city is not a material man-made wall, but the invisible divine presence, comes within the circle of missionary ideas and speaks, if unconsciously, of the breaking-down of monopolies.

It is, however, in the section of scripture now known as Deutero-Isaiah that these thoughts reach their loftiest height and their noblest form of expression (Isa., chaps. 40-50). Fortunately we are not called upon to discuss the collective or individual interpretation of the servant-passages, as in either case the ideal is there. The election of the servant is clearly an election to service. Such a passage as, "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens shall be your plowmen and vine-dressers" (61:5), shows how difficult it was then even for men of faith, as now, to live at that lofty height. But to the author of this remarkable section it is almost his native air. He has been well called "the evangelist of the Old Testament," for the evangel is not a mere form of words, it is a message of comfort from God breathing a spirit of tenderness and hope.

In 42:1-4, for example, we have set forth in clear terms and wide prophetic hope the ideal of the true teacher and the highest kind of missionary. We cannot quote at length or discuss in detail the great poem of the suffering servant (52:13-53:12) but we are justified in saying with regard to it that, on any interpretation, the thought of vicarious suffering takes on then a higher, more ethical tone, and when a truth reaches such a lofty height it qualifies itself to pass beyond national limitations; it looks forward to a time when it shall be recognized and received by all men of clear spiritual vision. If we may accept the collective idea, Israel the servant of the nations, which finds favor with so many scholars, then we have a missionary idea quite pronounced in its character. The leaders of thought in Israel have now learned that there is one God unique in power and righteousness, that he is the ever-present creator, the moving force of the world's history, the Redeemer of his people; that he has ordained

the Persian emperor to deliver his people, and trained that people to minister to the higher life of the world. All this is expressed with passionate feeling and poetic form by the great prophet of the Exile. It would be too much to expect that the average Jew can all at once rise to this sublimest height of self-abnegation, especially when he has to face centuries of scornful persecution from an ignorant and unbelieving world. But when such a vision has once been reached it cannot be lost completely. The vision of sacrifice and service is a prophecy in its incompleteness and need of fulfilment as well as in its comparative perfection and great advance.

Thus we come to the conclusion that in the Old Testament literature we can discern the growth of a missionary idea, great in its range and containing a complexity of elements, which forms a real preparation for the Christian gospel and the noblest kind of Christian work. The great advantage of this literature over other sacred books is that it shows the growth of the central truths of religion moving from stage to stage in a living process which by its wonderful connection with human life and its inward harmony approves itself to the highest intelligence as a manifestation of God. This body of truth looks forward to a time when its loftiest principles shall be carried forward to their true goal and its temporary elements shall be left behind. The severest student of Old Testament exegesis and the most consistent historical critic is often startled to find how germinal, how prophetic, are some of the simplest sayings. We do not need to read our dogmas into this ancient literature or seek to glorify it by an outworn allegorical method; we need simply to allow a true religious sympathy and chastened imagination free play. Then may we enter into the heart of that great movement, with its ebb and flow, its ever-widening stream of truth, and its ever-narrowing ecclesiastical form. And then we shall find that within the exclusiveness of national and ecclesiastical feeling and behind the pedantry of dry rabbinism there is preserved for the world a priceless treasure, a literature which enshrines in forms that the world will not willingly let die a real missionary idea, an idea of God and an aspiration toward a broader faith only to be fulfilled when the old tribalism has been conquered and Jehovah of Hosts is transformed into the Father of mankind.